

Environmental group urges Ontario to stop letting golfing facilities use cosmetic pesticides



It's enough to tee off the golf course industry.

A report released by the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment is calling for golf courses to be included in cosmetic pesticide bans.

"We do see it as one of the problems we would like to plug," Kim Perrotta, executive director of CAPE, said this week.

When Ontario passed its cosmetic pesticide law in 2008, it prohibited the use of all pesticides on lawns, vegetable and ornamental gardens, patios and driveways and in cemeteries, parks and school yards.

But golf courses were given an exemption to the ban on using pesticides to kill weeds and insects.

London had passed its own cosmetic pesticide bylaw two years earlier that also exempted golf courses and playing fields. That bylaw was set aside by the provincial law.

Other provinces that have passed cosmetic pesticide laws also have exempted golf courses.

Instead of a total ban in Ontario, golf courses have been required to implement integrated pest management systems — managing plants to reduce the need for pesticides and waiting until specific thresholds were reached before applying pesticides to control insects.

Ontario also required golf courses to prepare and publish an annual report on what pesticides were used on the course and how much was applied.

James Beebe, president of the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association, said the decision by jurisdictions to exempt golf courses from full bans is the correct policy.

"We are using products that are certified through the government," Beebe said, adding applicators must go through stringent training and certification courses.

Other methods are relied on to keep golf courses looking great, such as proper aeration and application of water, he said, but sometimes pesticides are needed when there is an outbreak of turf grass disease or insect infestation.

"It is one tool in the toolbox to manage properties. Because pesticides are expensive, golf course superintendents aren't motivated to use pesticides and will use as many alternatives as possible," Beebe said.

In addition to including golf courses in pesticide bans, CAPE's report calls for measures to restrict the indoor use of pesticides, requiring the use of the least toxic products. At present Quebec is the only jurisdiction that prohibits the use of pesticides indoor.

CAPE also called for annual random audits of retailers who sell pesticides and a tracking system to monitor potential abuses.

CAPE, however, praised Ontario's approach to banning the cosmetic use of pesticides with its law going beyond lawns and including gardens, trees, shrubs, flowers and ornamental plants.

"We really like that comprehensiveness. Health risks really have to take precedent over people's desire for nice-looking lawns and gardens," said Perrotta.

"Ontario has done a very good job of protecting families and their children from cosmetic pesticides."
